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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 003262

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/20/2006

TAGS: PTER PINS KISL AG

SUBJECT: RECENT TERRORIST ATTACKS: BLOODIER, BUT
NOT INDICATIVE OF NEW TERRORIST STRENGTH

REF: ALGIERS 2884

¶1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JOSEPH
STAFFORD, AMEMBASSY ALGIERS, REASON 1.5 (D).

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF NEARLY
FIVE YEARS OF SUSTAINED VIOLENCE HERE, NOVEMBER 1996
HAS WITNESSED SOME PARTICULARLY GRUESOME TERRORIST
ATROCITIES, ESPECIALLY IN CENTRAL ALGERIA. RATHER
THAN TRYING TO PREVENT NEWSPAPERS FROM PUBLISHING
STORIES ABOUT THE ATROTIIES, THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS
TO BE ENCOURAGING THEM TO DO SO. THESE LATEST
ATTACKS HAVE AGGRAVATED PUBLIC WORRIES ABOUT THE
SECURITY SITUATION, ESPECIALLY IN THE MOUNTAINOUS
REGIONS OUTSIDE ALGIERS. WE SENSE, HOWEVER, LITTLE
CHANGE IN CITIZEN'S DAILY ROUTINE IN ALGIERS OR EVEN
THE NEARBY BLIDA REGION, SCENE OF SEVERAL OF THE
RECENT INCIDENTS. THIS LATEST UPTURN IN VIOLENCE
HAS NOT YET PROVIDED CONVINCING EVIDENCE OF NEW
CAPABILITIES ON THE PART OF EXTREMIST ELEMENTS, NOR
OF A GREATER THREAT TO REGIME STABILITY. AT THIS
POINT, WE SEE NO/NO REASON TO REVISE OUR ASSESSMENT
THAT THE GOA IS MAKING PROGRESS IN REDUCING THE
INSURGENCY THREAT -- BUT LESS PROGRESS IN REDUCING
TERRORISM. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (U) TERRORIST INCIDENTS AGAINST CIVILIANS
REMAIN FREQUENT IN ALGERIA, BUT NOVEMBER 1996
APPEARS TO BE A PARTICULARLY HORRIFIC MONTH.
MURDERS OF CIVILIANS APPEAR TO HAVE INCREASED FROM
THE LEVELS EARLIER IN THE AUTUMN. THE LIST OF
RECENT ATTACKS INCLUDES, BUT IS NOT LIMITED TO:

- THE NOVEMBER 5 MASSACRE OF 13 CIVILIANS IN DAOUDA, IN TIPAZA WILAYA;
- THE NOVEMBER 7 BOMBING IN A VILLAGE NEAR TLEMCEN, IN WESTERN ALGERIA, WHICH KILLED FIVE, INCLUDING THE VILLAGE MAYOR;
- THE NOVEMBER 8 SLAUGHTER OF 31 PERSONS IN SIDI EL KEBIR VILLAGE, OUTSIDE OF BLIDA;
- THE NOVEMBER 10 BOMBING IN BIR KHADEM, OUTSIDE OF ALGIERS, WHICH KILLED SEVEN (INCLUDING THE SISTER OF AN EMBASSY FSN EMPLOYEE);
- THE NOVEMBER 12 ATTACK WHICH KILLED 14 PERSONS NEAR OUED ALLEG, IN BLIDA WILAYA;
- THE NOVEMBER 13 KILLINGS OF 29 PERSONS IN TWO INCIDENTS IN MEDEA WILAYA;
- THE NOVEMBER 15 MURDER OF A BULGARIAN CITIZEN IN ALGIERS.

¶4. (C) FROM WHAT LITTLE WE CAN PICK UP FROM OUR
CONTACTS, THE RECENT SPATE OF INCIDENTS HAS
AGGRAVATED THE WORRIES OF MANY, ESPECIALLY IN THE
MOUNTAINS OUTSIDE OF ALGIERS, ABOUT SECURITY. IN
SOME CASES, THESE INCIDENTS STIRRED VILLAGES TO
HASTEN CREATION OF LOCAL MILITIAS. FOR EXAMPLE,
IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE MASSACRE AT SIDI EL KEBIR,

THE GOVERNMENT DISTRIBUTED ARMS TO VILLAGERS WHO SUBSEQUENTLY KILLED TWO ALLEGED TERRORISTS, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS. AN ALGERIAN WHO LIVES IN A VILLAGE NEAR THE JUNCTIONS OF BLIDA, TIPAZA AND ALGIERS WILAYAS TOLD POLOFF NOVEMBER 12 THAT MANY IN HIS COMMUNITY FEAR AN ATTACK BY ARMED ISLAMISTS; HE PREDICTED IT WAS ONLY A QUESTION OF TIME. IN RESPONSE, THE VILLAGE HAS ASKED THE LOCAL MILITARY AUTHORITIES FOR ARMS WITH WHICH TO ESTABLISH A "SELF-PROTECTION" FORCE (SO FAR, AUTHORITIES HAVE DECLINED TO SUPPLY WEAPONS).

15. (C) IN SOME CASES FAMILIES HAVE TAKEN FLIGHT. A JOURNALIST WITH THE AVOWEDLY ANTI-ISLAMIST NEWSPAPER LIBERTE TOLD US THAT ONE OF THEIR REPORTERS SAW IN BLIDA ON NOVEMBER 18 HUNDREDS OF PERSONS WHO HAD FLED THEIR HOMES IN REMOTE MOUNTAIN LOCALES OUTSIDE OF THE CITY AND TAKEN REFUGE IN DOWNTOWN BLIDA (ITSELF NOT THE SAFEST PLACE). THE REPORTER SAID THAT SEVERAL OF THESE PEOPLE TOLD HIM THE ARMED GROUPS OPERATING IN THE MOUNTAINS HAVE VOWED TO COMMIT MORE MASSACRES. (ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE BAND WHICH COMMITTED THE NOVEMBER 12 MURDERS AT OUED ALLEG LEFT A NOTE SIGNED BY THE ARMED ISLAMIC GROUP (GIA) AND CONCLUDING WITH THE EXPRESSION, "BLOOD, BLOOD, DESTRUCTION, DESTRUCTION.")

16. (C) THE GOVERNMENT HAS CHANGED ITS MEDIA POLICY IN RESPONSE TO THESE TERRORIST INCIDENTS. (IT HAD BEEN GENERALLY RESTRAINING NEWSPAPERS FROM PUBLISHING STORIES ABOUT THE SECURITY SITUATION.) A JOURNALIST FROM AN ARABIC DAILY TOLD POLOFF NOVEMBER 19 THAT THE INFORMATION MINISTRY CALLED HIS NEWSPAPER NOVEMBER 11 TO ASK WHY THE JOURNAL HAD NOT HIGHLIGHTED THE SIDI EL KEBIR MASSACRE WITH A STORY AND PHOTOS ON PAGE ONE LIKE OTHER NEWSPAPERS. THIS SOURCE STATED THAT THE MINISTRY ENCOURAGED THE NEWSPAPER TO GIVE GREATER EMPHASIS TO TERRORIST ATTACKS; THE JOURNALIST COULDN'T EXPLAIN EXACTLY WHY. MEANWHILE, THE TELEVISION NEWS HAS REPORTED THE MANY INCIDENTS (AFTER THE DAILY TAKE OF STORIES ABOUT RALLIES IN FAVOR OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM). AFTER THE SIDI EL KEBIR MASSACRE, THE TELEVISION EVEN RAN GRUESOME PICTURES OF BODIES, REMINISCENT OF BROADCASTS FROM 1994.

17. (C) DESPITE THE SPATE OF RECENT INCIDENTS, WE DETECT LITTLE CHANGE FROM CITIZENS' DAILY ROUTINE IN ALGIERS, ASIDE FROM A FEW EXTRA ROADBLOCKS. A SENIOR JOURNALIST FROM THE ARABIC DAILY EL-KHABER STRESSED TO POLOFF NOVEMBER 18 THAT LIFE IN AND AROUND BLIDA APPEARS TO BE MORE OR LESS AS IT WAS EARLIER IN THE AUTUMN. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE SPARKLING WATER PRODUCTION PLANT IN SIDI EL-KEBIR IS STILL OPERATING, FOR EXAMPLE. THE AFP CORRESPONDENT HERE CAUTIONED POLOFF NOVEMBER 19 THAT SOME OF THE MOST PUBLICIZED RECENT INCIDENTS WERE HOUR-LONG ASSAULTS AGAINST A FEW HOMES; HE CONTRASTED THIS WITH 1993 AND 1994, WHEN LARGER GROUPS SOMETIMES OCCUPIED WHOLE VILLAGES FOR AN ENTIRE NIGHT, OR ATTACKED MILITARY CAMPS.

COMMENT

18. (C) THIS SERIES OF TERRORIST ATTACKS DOES NOT CAUSE US TO CHANGE OUR ASSESSMENT IN REFTEL THAT THE GOA IS MAKING PROGRESS IN REDUCING THE INSURGENCY THREAT -- BUT LESS PROGRESS IN REDUCING TERRORISM. THE CENTRAL, MOUNTAINOUS WILAYAS OF BLIDA, TIPAZA, AND MEDEA, WHERE MOST OF THE RECENT INCIDENTS TOOK PLACE, HAVE LONG BEEN STRONGHOLDS OF ARMED ISLAMISTS. EVEN THERE, WE DO NOT SEE CONCERTED ATTACKS AGAINST INFRASTRUCTURE, NOR ARE WE AWARE OF A SHARPLY HIGHER NUMBER OF MILITARY--AS OPPOSED TO CIVILIAN--DEATHS. THUS, THE MANY INCIDENTS OF

NOVEMBER 1996 DO NOT YET PROVIDE EVIDENCE EITHER THAT TERRORIST GROUPS HAVE GAINED SIGNIFICANT NEW CAPABILITIES WITH WHICH TO THREATEN, MUCH LESS TOPPLE, THE GOVERNMENT. MOREOVER, GIVEN THE LONG SERIES OF UP AND DOWN CYCLES OF VIOLENCE HERE SINCE 1992, THESE LATEST ATROCITIES DO NOT SIGNIFY THAT THE ALGERIAN MILITARY'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE TERRORIST GROUPS HAS SUFFERED A SERIOUS REVERSE. RATHER, NOVEMBER 1996 SERVES TO REMIND THAT ENDING THE TERRORISM HERE WILL BE A LONG PROCESS AT BEST. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE RECENT INCIDENTS ARE DESIGNED, AT LEAST IN PART, TO DISSUADE CITIZENS FROM VENTURING FORTH TO VOTE IN THE NOVEMBER 28 CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM. IF SO, WE HAVE GOTTERN NO SENSE THAT THE EXTREMISTS' INTIMIDATION CAMPAIGN IS HAVING MUCH IMPACT.

STAFFORD